



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

FRANCE OF TO-DAY.¹

WITHIN the past year two elaborate studies of contemporary France have appeared. That by Baron de Coubertin has already been discussed in this *QUARTERLY*.² Although that work (like Mr. Bodley's book, with which we have to do primarily here) is first and foremost an essay on the political and parliamentary *régime*, the author finds space to discuss instructively, if briefly, other important phases of French life—all with that remarkable openness of mind and keen national self-insight so peculiar to the French. But, in spite of its marked excellencies and breadth of view, M. de Coubertin's work is a little esoteric. It was written for Frenchmen, and demands for its complete understanding a somewhat intimate acquaintance with the ins and outs of French political life and of French parliamentary phrase and custom. Many allusions, and even some of the solid instruction in the volume, may on this account be lost for the average American reader. For this M. de Coubertin is, of course, in no way to blame. Had he endeavored to make his book more readily intelligible to the foreigner, it would inevitably have lost half its charm for those for whom it was primarily written. His translator has, moreover, ill performed her task. Not only has she failed to render any assistance by a judicious footnote here and there, but she also confuses the reader by many an awkward, even downright incorrect, rendering. Mr. Bodley's work, on the other hand, comes to us in what is at once his own vernacular and ours. It is written for his own people and its political terminology—naturally that of Great Britain—is better known to us than that of France.

No one can take up his volumes without being struck by their freshness and promise. They contain much that is entertaining, much that is new, much that is instructive. The conscientiousness of the writer is beyond reproach. It first exhibits itself in a detailed account of his seven years of special preparation for his task, of the cities and villages which he visited, and of the ex-ministers, officials, *savants* and *littérateurs* who entertained him and forwarded his researches. The elaborate *pièce justificative* with which Mr. Bodley

¹ France. By John Edward Courtenay Bodley. New York, The Macmillan Co., 1898. — 2 vols., xviii, 345, 504 pp.

² See vol. xii, pp. 711 *et seq.*

prefaces his work affords ample evidence, indeed, that no one ever more thoroughly realized the delicacy of his task or fitted himself more conscientiously for its execution or had more favorable conditions in bringing it to a happy issue.

The initial impression of general cheerfulness which one receives upon visiting France, and which the transient sojourner carries away with him, is, Mr. Bodley claims, soon displaced, as one comes to reside in that country, by the conviction that the French are no longer the sanguine people that they once were.

The *esprit critique*, which made the French Revolution, has never ceased to be active, but under the Third Republic it has taken the form of pessimism, acute and contagious, affecting every portion of the nation, excepting that which goes resolutely about its daily work without troubling to think whether France is ill or well governed, or what is the precise nature of her prestige among the powers of Europe.

In his search for the cause of this striking phenomenon, the writer rejects the explanation that French pessimism is merely a symptom of the universal malady of the age, and concludes that "there are peculiar causes which give to the nation its predisposition, unnatural to its temperament, to contract inordinately the dolorous contagion." The theory, commonly held, that the disastrous reverses of 1870 still weigh upon the spirit of the French, producing peevishness and suspicion, loses much of its plausibility in view of the fact that in the years immediately following the war, while the Prussians were still encamped on their soil and the ravages of war were still about them, all classes of the French were hopeful rather than downcast. It is after a quarter of a century of prosperous peace and unprecedented stability of government that the gloom has grown deepest.

The rancorous discord in French public life [Mr. Bodley concludes] is a persistent source of the malady which has a more depressing effect than the distant memory of a sharp grief; and the steady growth of pessimism is a sure sign that there is something essentially wrong in the government of the country. The root of the ill is to be found not in its republican form, though the democratic basis of that *régime* extends the area of the evil, but in the parliamentary system.

The discredit of the parliamentary system is, in turn, ascribed to its association with a highly centralized administration, "constructed to be manipulated by one strong hand, and, instead of modifying the defects of centralization, parliamentary government aggravates them."

To this important theme Mr. Bodley devotes the greater part of his work ; and his experience in English political life, coupled with his long residence in France, enables him to speak as one having authority. He sums up the matter in the following words :

An essential feature of a centralized bureaucracy is the profusion of offices held directly from the state ; and the French have found out that, whatever the evil of vesting their patronage in a strong central power, it is more harmful to the commonwealth to transfer it to the elected representatives of the nation ; for, as we shall see, each member of Parliament, not hostile to the government, thus becomes a wholesale dispenser of places, controlling the administrative and fiscal services in his constituency, and supervising the promotion of the judges. Moreover, to augment his popularity, a legislator likes to have as many posts as possible to bestow.

Mr. Bodley's reflections can scarcely fail to interest a citizen of the United States, who may, however, question whether the control of patronage by members of legislative bodies necessarily superinduces pessimism. Most of us are able to behold political corruption in high and low places with a degree of equanimity, not to say cheerfulness, which might have caused Mr. Bodley, had he been more familiar with our conditions, to distrust his generalizations.

Another topic, which unfortunately is sure to catch the eye of the American reader, is the popular newspaper, although the Parisian penny-dreadful is obviously different from our own.

Every day throughout France are distributed tens of thousands of cheap journals, which, expressing every shade of opinion from the doctrine of the Commune to reactionary clericalism, have one feature in common, the scurrilous aspersion of public men. Sometimes the objects of their fury are not worthy of the high position to which the hazards of an ill-contrived political system have raised them ; but, as a rule, the defamatory clamor has little relation with the real actions or character of the persons denounced. At all events, it is demoralizing for the nation that those who read the newspapers in town and country should daily be told that all Frenchmen in authority, whether politicians, diplomatists, judges, or ecclesiastics, are tainted with vice or even branded with crime.

Before entering upon the discussion of his main subject — parliamentary government in France — Mr. Bodley devotes several chapters to the relation of that perennially fascinating occurrence, the Revolution, to modern France. A more profound study of the conditions existing previous to the summoning of the States General in 1789 would certainly have led our author to form a different conception of the Revolution itself and of its results. He regards the reform move-

ment as simply political: he does not view it as fundamentally civil, social and economic. Hence he dwells — as is, indeed, quite in accord with tradition — upon the least happy of the innovations of the early legislative assemblies, to the exclusion of their great and permanent work of reconstruction. This one-sided view is illustrated by his “table of some of the more important dates in the history of France,” in which neither the decree abolishing the feudal system nor the civil constitution of the clergy finds a place. His conventional view of the “Terror” is betrayed by his estimate of Camille Desmoulins, whom he ranks with Robespierre and Fouché as a ferocious guillotining leveller. Even Carlyle knew better than that.

Nevertheless, the earlier, essentially introductory, chapters upon the theory and practice of the three arch-dogmas of the Revolution — liberty, equality and fraternity — are not only admirably written, but are at once instructive and diverting. The average reader, even if indifferent to the more exhaustive account of the representative system which follows, will read these pages with pleasure and profit. The French seem to Mr. Bodley to cling to the mechanism of despotism under the present republic as though to preserve it for the use of the master they may at any time decide to set up again. From an English standpoint the increased degree of liberty which the republic, as compared with the second empire, permits the French to enjoy is inconsiderable. Moreover, our ideas of personal freedom are shocked both by the legal procedure in France and by an intolerance in religion which plays a curious rôle in public affairs. So much has recently been said of the French judicial system, as illustrated by the trial of M. Zola, that its characteristics are tolerably familiar to us. Criminal procedure has been somewhat modified of late, but Mr. Bodley thinks that there is no prospect that the magistracy will adopt, or that public opinion will enforce, the doctrine which presumes the innocence of a prisoner before trial.

While there is much sincere tolerance in France and much more or less philosophic indifference, there are, unfortunately, two opposing groups of fanatics in whom all the bigotry of earlier centuries lives on. The clerical party may have some claims to indulgence, on the ground that it merely adheres to a once universally accepted belief in the expediency of enforcing religious conformity. The anti-clerical party, on the other hand, is only a parody of the party it opposes: it imitates the vices, but is entirely wanting in the virtues, of its equally frantic rival. In illustration, Mr. Bodley cites cases which happily have no analogies in this country, except perhaps in local educational

matters. A postmaster, for instance, is kindly warned by the sub-prefect that it is reported that he not only goes to church but takes a book with him, and that a man who follows the service with a book must not be surprised if he be put down as a "clerical." This fact, as well as the active part taken by the postmaster's daughters in church affairs, is duly recorded by the representative of the local government, and may later make trouble for the postmaster. Such terrorizing affects public servants of every rank—from the most humble functionary to the president of the republic, who may not be seen in church for fear of arousing widespread political suspicion and opposition.

The official pretension of the French that their nation is peculiarly endowed with a love of equality Mr. Bodley declares to be but a stale repetition of an outworn Revolutionary legend. His discussion of the "Legion of Honor" and of the use of titles of nobility, as contrasted with that in England, is not the least suggestive part of his work. The doctrine of fraternity, too, as it is applied in France, is easily shown to exhibit many anomalies and contradictions, which are discussed by our author under the suggestive headings: "Harshness of Frenchmen to Frenchmen," "The Cult of Fratricide," "The Furies of Journalism," "The Philosophy of Scapegoats," *etc.*

After briefly reviewing, at the close of his first volume, the history of the executive since 1873, Mr. Bodley devotes the whole of his second volume to the parliamentary system and the organization of political parties. This exhaustive study of the organization and actual conduct of the French legislature forms the central theme of the entire work. While the writer believes the parliamentary system to be not simply a downright failure but the root, as well, of many of the evils upon which he dwells, he does not allow this conviction to prevent his treating the subject in a singularly objective fashion. He is eminently just and exhibits what may be called a spirit of scientific sympathy. He considers the perversities of the Senate and Chamber as an alienist might view the equivocal conduct of a lunatic, in whom he saw only the ill-starred victim of circumstances—curious, indeed, and perhaps instructive, but certainly not an object of reprobation. Mr. Bodley writes frankly as an Englishman well satisfied with the system of lawmaking peculiarly associated with his own country. England, he thinks, has been governed under a *régime* which suits the national temperament, while France has not.

The British Constitution [says he] deserves most of the praise that has been applied to it; but its name implies that it is admirable as a working

machine within the realm in which it has slowly developed. As the Church of England says of one of its sacraments, it is not intended to be "carried about or worshipped"; and this is how the French *doctrinaires* treated it.

But the reader must turn to the book itself for a description of the French Parliament, of the parties of which it is composed and of the venality of which it has been so freely accused. One more quotation relating to the frequency of ministerial crises, may, however, be added, because it tersely expresses the hopelessness of the existing system, as it appears to a careful observer:

In considering the working of the parliamentary system in France, we always get into the same series of vicious circles. If to remedy ministerial instability ministers were no longer responsible to Parliament, the machinery of centralization might fall into the power of an ambitious band, who would dispense with the legislature in governing France. Or if the nomination of the ministers, no longer responsible to Parliament, passed, in reality as well as nominally, into the hands of the chief of the state, he, if popular and capable, would be subject to the temptation of making himself dictator by nominating his own creatures, who would abet his schemes of autocracy by means of the redoubtable machinery confided to them. Consequently, there is no remedy under a *régime* of representative government. Ephemeral ministries must succeed one another at brief intervals, the office of minister must remain in misesteem, and parliamentary anarchy must continue, because France possesses a centralized system of administration essential to her existence, and because the French have an ever-latent longing to be governed by a master.

All students of French institutions will not agree with Mr. Bodley that escape from this vicious circle is impossible. Professor Saleilles, for example, although he sees much to lament in the working of the government, perceives at the same time a very encouraging development under the present constitutional laws. Is it not possible, as he suggests, that under stress of circumstances, the minute subdivisions of party may in time give place to two predominating groups which will govern in turn the choice of president and ministers? "The parliamentary system," he maintains — *contra* Mr. Bodley — "combined with the election of the head of the state by the Parliament, may become an instrument of the first order, for so soon as the majority shall find itself dominated by two powerful forces — the president and the ministry — proceeding from it, it will immediately submit to their directing influence."¹

¹ *Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science*, VI, 76.

The derivation of the French parliamentary system from that of England appears to Mr. Bodley to justify an almost exclusive use of the institutions of his own country as a basis of comparison. He scarcely exhibits even a superficial knowledge of other constitutions than those of France and of Great Britain. From a study of Germany one is naturally deterred, he observes, by the difficulty of its language. As for our own "sovereign states," as he calls them, and the Union which they have formed, these call forth only an occasional allusion. Englishmen have, as Hamerton well says,¹ generally refused to see anything natural or regular in the remarkable process of French development; and Mr. Bodley, in spite of every precaution, sometimes falls into this extremely English way of looking at French affairs. France's love of military glory and her enduring instinct of submission to an arbitrary ruler are to him the only two national characteristics which enable us vaguely to forecast the future.

In point of style the volumes before us show much resource: illustrations chosen from the author's own experience meet us on every page, and there is none of the aridness which we might expect as we take up a treatise on government. Occasionally, however, a sentence degenerates into a series of historical or literary allusions and dubious innuendoes, which tax the reader's patience or excite a smile.

In conclusion, it should be noted that Mr. Bodley's work is, as he himself realizes, not a symmetrical account of the French nation as it exists to-day. Nor is it likely to become such, even if the author adds, as he plans to do, one or more volumes dealing with other phases of the government; for, as an acute critic of the work — himself a Frenchman — has pointed out, the Constitution in France "holds no such place, as an element of its national life, as the British Constitution and the Constitution of the United States hold in the national life of the English and of the American people." The depressing reflections aroused by Mr. Bodley's melancholy picture of the workings of the parliamentary system in France must not, therefore, be allowed to extend to the activity of the people as a whole, any more than a history of the legislature of New York during the past quarter of a century should be looked upon as an exhaustive account of the people of that state during that period.

JAMES HARVEY ROBINSON.

¹ Cf. French and English, I, 146.